TL4094

PO Box 9716, Wellington, New Zealand

Harry Bruhns
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Helen Clark
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Parliament Buildings
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Dear Helen

I am writing concerning events at the 1986 Labour Party Conference.

I was initially shocked and angry that you of all people had been a major mover in the defeat of parts of Remit 112, and the weakening of other parts of that remit. However you have a creditable record of support for oppressed peoples (including of recent, the Nicaraguans), hence I wish to presume that you have acted in this matter in the cause of justice, and that the justice includes due consideration for the people of East Timor.

However I am perplexed.

I have not forgotten the conversation we had just after your visit to Indonesia, nor suddenly become unaware of the enormous forces weighed against independence for East Timor. I am also aware of Indonesia's importance to New Zealand in the current international state of things.

We both agreed in that conversation that the most one could realistically hope for in the near future for East Timor, was a quasi-independent status, and that the foremost concern in attaining that was the inclusion of parties of East Timor that were representative of the people. That is, the inclusion of Fretilin and the Catholic church. I am relieved that at least that part of the intent of the remit survived.

However I distinguish between a remit carried by the Party, and Government policy and action. I consider that the content of the remit as revised by the conference is the absolute minimum acceptable as Government policy (if Labour Party principles are not to become totally meaningless). I do not see how it could have been but easier for the Government to put such policy into action with the backing of a stronger conference remit, as was the original remit.

Hence my perplexity. It seems to me that you have put the Government into a weaker position in its capacity to have any influence on Indonesia by taking away the stonger demand of the Party, and I cannot see any clear way in which the revised remit could be of assistance to Government lobbying for talks and aid.

Indeed one of your revisions goes so far as to query (by its wording of "where the evidence exists ...") that there are still violations of human rights occurring in East Timor (I would have thought that the Indonesian prescence in East Timor was itself a major human rights violation).

Further, New Zealand is by refusing to press in any way at all for independence, contravening a basic doctrine of international law; that a nation cannot get title to a territory by aggression. It is bad enough that the Labour Government has taken such a stand, perhaps they were forced to by the reality of foreign affairs. You have put the Labour Party into the position of also contravening that doctrine.

To sum up, I cannot see how the limited amount that New Zealand can do for East Timor has been but lessened by the weakening of Remit 112. The Party as well as the Government is now involved in quite basic contraventions of international law. I am surprised that you were part of that weakening process, but it is difficult to accept that you would have made a trade of some kind, with East Timor as the price.

At your convenience I would be very grateful for clarification of these matters, by letter or meeting.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely

Harry Bruhns